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UMN Morris Students Fight “Fake News” Abroad

“It gave us a chance to look at disinformation, media, propaganda, and the influence of ‘fake news’ in real lives.”—Professor Barbara Burke

University of Minnesota Morris students and faculty just returned from a study abroad course on media literacy and democracy. The course, in partnership with the Baltic International Summer School (BISS) and hosted by the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, taught students to analyze media messages and to be more aware of how disinformation is created and spread.

The course helped students explore the role of media by enhancing their critical thinking skills and refining how they evaluate and produce media. Its location offered an especially unique experience: Latvia is a post-Soviet space facing propaganda concerns today.

“It gave us a chance to look at disinformation, media, propaganda, and the influence of ‘fake news’ in real lives,” says Barbara Burke, associate professor of communication, media, and rhetoric (CMR), who taught the course.

Internationalizing the Curriculum

With democracy and politics as main components of the course, Burke and BISS committed to having an international cohort of students work together to foster global perspectives and intercultural communication. “It wasn’t just Morris students meet Latvians. It was Morris students meet people from everywhere, *and* Latvians, in a Latvian setting.”

“I worked with people from eight different countries, oftentimes from countries that I knew nothing about apart from geographic location,” says Hailey LaMont ’19. “Being able to go out and explore places that are unfamiliar, where the culture differs from my own, is truly fantastic.”

In their final project, students produced mini documentaries on media literacy, asking questions like, “How do you combat false or misleading information?” and “How do we understand the steps necessary to identify fake messages?” The work, they say, was timely and relevant.

“In recent history, politics and communications have been intricately intertwined” adds LaMont. “You need to be acutely aware of the political climate.”

A Growing Partnership

This partnership with Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences was made possible by Burke’s 2013 [Fulbright Award](#). For this course, Burke partnered with [previous collaborator Liene Ločmele](#), lecturer at the host college and BISS content manager, to give Morris students the opportunity for a firsthand experience.

Study abroad at Morris is hosted by the Academic Center for Enrichment. To learn more, visit ace.morris.umn.edu